

DRIVEN

Lexington Patrolwoman Becomes First Female Motorcycle Officer in Kentucky



/Jamie Ball, Public Information Officer

Lexington Police Officer Tembree Murphy has enjoyed her work as a patrol officer for the past four years, but now, she says, she prefers to do it on the two wheels of a Harley-Davidson.

Murphy, 33, became the first state-certified female motorcycle officer in Kentucky after successfully completing the police department's two-week motorcycle training course in May, according to the Lexington Division of Police.

"It made me feel really good," Murphy said of passing the class. "It was a big accomplishment."

The officer is now among the 14 of Lexington's 23 certified motorcycle officers who patrol on the agency's Harley-Davidson Electra Glide motorcycles full time, save inclement weather.

"I absolutely love it," she said. "Prior to the bike, I thoroughly enjoyed my job. It's just that much better now."

But getting there wasn't easy.

Sgt. Billy Richmond said Murphy's passing the course "speaks volumes of her."

Murphy had never even taken a ride on a motorcycle prior to her training, so – at her sergeant's suggestion – she started with a beginner's class in Richmond a couple of weeks prior to the Lexington course.

"She was very dedicated to learning to ride the motorcycle," Richmond said. "She's about as tough as they come."

Once in Lexington's course, officers focused on techniques like braking; low-speed, high precision maneuvering; and collision avoidance.

"It was a very, very stressful class, both mentally and physically," Murphy said.

Students must also complete a timed obstacle course on the motorcycle and lift a bike lying on its side to an upright position. With police equipment on them,

the motorcycles weigh at least 900 pounds, said Lexington Officer Todd Kleinjan, who instructed Murphy's class.

"This is a very tough course," he said, noting that 15 to 20 percent of the officers in each class do not complete it.

Murphy said she considered herself naturally strong, but that she increased her workout to help her with picking up the bike and the slow-speed maneuvers that required extra control.

During the first week of her 80-hour course, Murphy became injured and was forced to take a couple of days off from training, Kleinjan said.

"She worked as hard as anybody to get through that course," he said. "She busted her butt and worked hard. This is something that she really wanted. She was just incredible to work with, willing to take instruction and never gave up, which is evidenced by her successful completion of the course."

Kleinjan, who is one of the few people in Kentucky who is state certified to provide police motorcycle training, said that only one other female has attempted the course in his four years as an instructor.

"It's just something that I wanted to accomplish," Murphy said. "There's not a lot in police work that you can do anymore that hasn't been accomplished by a female. But they hadn't done this," she said.

"I hope it encourages other females to try areas that have only been dominated by men," Murphy said.

Murphy said she had wanted to learn to drive a motorcycle for a long time. She gained the desire to become a motorcycle officer soon after she joined the police department and met some of the unit's officers while policing at University of Kentucky football games, she said.

"It looked like fun, and it is," she said. "To be able to do that with a job that I love is awesome."

The officer said she dislikes being off work now because she misses riding the motorcycle. She said she is considering getting a personal bike.

Murphy and the other full-time motorcycle officers make up Lexington's Selective Enforcement Unit, which works to enforce the traffic laws in areas of the city where there are a lot of wrecks and complaints about speeding and other violations, Kleinjan said.

"The police motorcycle is the number one traffic-control tool available," he said. "You can't beat it."

The motorcycle officers are also assigned cruisers for days the weather prevents them from using the bikes.

Motorcycles are practical for traffic, Richmond said. They are small and can be used to easily maneuver in traffic and around houses, which seem to be getting closer, Richmond said.

"They're so much easier to use than just cruisers," he said.

The motorcycles are also more fuel economic than police cruisers and a great public relations tool, Richmond said. The department uses them in parades and as funeral escorts, among other activities, he said.

"People pay attention to them, ask questions about them," he said. "Kids are drawn to them, and adults love them too."

Richmond said the department, which has 14 motorcycles, wants to own at least 20 of them by the 2010 World Equestrian Games that will be held in Lexington. The agency started motorcycle patrol in 2001.

Lexington's motorcycle instructors train at the Institute of Police Technology and Management in Florida, and are certified by the Kentucky Law Enforcement Council to provide training across the commonwealth.

For more information on the motorcycle-training course, contact Sgt. Billy Richmond at the Lexington Police Department at (859) 258-3600. **J**

/Photo by Elizabeth Thomas